(b) the sector-wise distribution of these workers differentiating them by the type of work in tobacco sector;

(c) whether Government have taken steps to protect their level of employment; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) The number of workers in the tobacco economy sector-wise in A.P. is estimated as under:—

	lakh
1. Production including grading at farm level	14.5
2. Handling operations by the buyers including regarding	0.4
3. Redrying/threshing operations	0.7
	15.0

(c) and (d) With the objective of protecting employment in this sector, Government through Tobacco Board is taking all possible steps to promote exports of tobacco and tobacco products.

Competition to Indian Tobacco Exports

1816. SHRI YERRA NARAYANASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India is facing competition from other tobacco growing countries for tobacco exports;

(b) if so, what are the names of countries which are fast becoming major competitors of Indian tobacco; and

(c) the steps being taken to protect the tobacco exports?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The major competitors of Indian tobacco are Brazil, Zimbabwe, China, Greece, Italy, Argentina, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malawi etc.

(c) Steps being taken to protect our tobacco exports include:

(i) Reorientation of production and developmental strategies to meet the challenge of the changing international scenario.

(ii) Enhancing quality and productivity levels of Indian tobacco so as to make it price competitive in international markets.

(iii) Expanding the base of quality tobacco in light soils by identification of suitable new areas.

(iv) Production of low tar and low Nicotine tobaccos.

(v) Elimination of unsuitable areas for tobacco cultivation.

(vi) Improving grading standards at firm level.

(vii) Provision of long term credit for export of tobacco.

(viii) Stengthening of existing markets and exploring new markets through sponsoring delegations, inviting delegations from abroad participation in international fairs and exhibitions.

(ix) Inclusion of tobacco in bilateral trade agreement.

(x) Encouraging Indian exporters to establish Indian own warehouses for stock and sale of tobacco and cigarettes in CIS countries.

(xi) Bringing in economy in curing costs and thus reduce the unit cost of production.

(xii) Allowing foreign investment in the areas of cigarette manufacturing mainly for export of cigarettes.

(xiii) Promoting 100 per cent EOUs for export of cigarettes.

Irregularities in export credit interest subsidy scheme, 1968

1817. SHRI AJIT P. K. JOGI:
SHRI RAM GOPAL YADAV:
Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Comptroller and Auditor General of India has pointed out some irregularities committed in the Export Credit (Interest Subsidy) Scheme, 1968;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken by Government in the matter so far?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: (a) and (b) The Comptroller and Auditor General of India in his report for the year ended 31st March, 1992 (No. 1 of 1993) (Civil) has pointed out that while auditing the accounts of 2783 branches of 78 banks they have noted some irregularities resulting in irregular or excess payment of interest subsidy amounting to Rs. 7.68 crores between January, 1987 and March, 1991. Following the Audit, Rs. 2.66 crores has been refunded by the banks to RBI upto 30th Sept., '91. The balance amount Rs. 5.02 crore is yet to be refunded.

(c) The reports of Government auditors relating to individual branches of scheduled commercial banks are received by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and audit objections are taken up with the concerned branches of banks for settlement. Wherever interest subsidy has been wrongly claimed by banks, recoveries are effected and in case the objections raised by CAG auditors are not in conformity with procedures laid down by RBI, the position is duly explained to CAG's Office for dropping the objections. After abolition of the Export Credit (Interest Subsidy) Scheme, 1968 w.e.f. 6th August, 1991, RBI have directed all scheduled commercial banks to expedite compliance reports on outstanding audit objections.

Crash in tea prices hitting nilgiri tea plants

1818. MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the small tea planters of the Nilgiris are in distress over the sudden crash in the prices of tea and have urged the Central Government to declare a minimum support price of Rs. 40/- per kg. and encourage exports to Russia and other CIS countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what action Government propose to take in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Representations have been received from the small tea growers of South India requesting the Government to fix a minimum support price of Rs. 40/- per kg. and also take steps for augmenting exports to Russia and CIS countries in view of the problems being faced by them due to decline in the prices of tea.

(c) The current decline in prices is mainly due to the lower off take of Indian teas by Russian buyers coupled with over supply of tea due to higher production during 1993. Efforts are being made to step up exports of tea. In this connection, Russian authorities nave been requested to procure higher quantities of teas from India under the debt repayment mechanism. A delegation had also visited Iran recently to sort out issue regarding delays in opening of LCs by Iranian authorities in respect of contracts signed for exports of tea to that country. It is expected that with the exports picking up, the prices of teas at various auction contres will also go up.

Indo-Israel trade

1819. MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the items of Indian exports to Israel during the last two years and their value earnings in dollar terms;

(b) the items of Indian imports from Israel during the same period and their value paid in dollar terms;

(c) whether the trade balance has been in favour of Israel; and

(d) if so, what steps Government propose to get a favourable trade balance with Israel?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI KAMALUDDIN AHMED): (a) The